

Testimony Before Public Health Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
February 27, 2009
SB 981

Distinguished Chairman Harris, Madam Chair Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of SB 981 An Act Concerning Automatic External Defibrillators in Schools. My name is Laura Binder, a resident of Norwich, and a teacher at the Norwich Free Academy.

I come to you today as both an educator and a citizen, to implore you to support this legislation. I do so as someone who believes wholeheartedly that government's most important responsibility is to protect its citizens and as one who believes that it is incumbent upon citizens to use their voice, their collective efforts and their rights to advocate for change. I teach this daily and I am blessed with students who have taken this lesson to heart, some of whom are here today. It is, however, with a profound sense of sadness that we come today in support of this legislation, for this is more to us than simply an exercise in civic duty – this is a personal mission born out of a great loss. For ten months, I was given the great privilege of teaching Larry Pontbriant, a young man who impressed me with his great sense of humor, tremendous work ethic and love of life. He was charismatic and charming, but he was also disarmingly genuine and kind. I watched over the course of the year, as he grew into a position of leadership within his class, embracing the experience of his education and engaging in learning with a real intellectual curiosity and joy. I asked Larry to be a peer mentor in a support class for struggling students, to help them study and to encourage them. He took to this task with humor and a readiness to help not always seen in young people. I have taught for thirteen years and it is without exaggeration that I tell you that he was one of the most engaging, interesting and gifted students I have ever had. I should be writing a recommendation for college for this young man – instead I find myself here, asking you to consider that this loss, this singular life is a compelling enough reason to enact legislation for AEDs in schools. If you had known him, I am certain you would agree. Larry was a standout, partly because his confidence and leadership drove others to rise to his level. Today I bring with me students who have been so impacted by this example, and it is a testament to him that they have channeled that action into our work on behalf of this cause. You have an opportunity, with your support of this legislation to save lives, to protect your communities and to act in the best interests of the common good – for this one life was precious, as is each you protect with this legislation.

On behalf of the students gathered here today and the larger Norwich Free Academy community, I wish to thank the committee members for allowing me to honor the memory of Larry Pontbriant, my student and my hero. Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill.